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## **The Problem of Dialogue in Northeast Asia**

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## **PREFACE**

This document is the product of the Institute for Defense Analyses Independent Research Program. I would like to thank two persons at IDA who have provided their personal support and advice for this study. Mr. Michael Leonard, Director of SF&RD, encouraged me throughout the project period, and Dr. Michael Fischerkeller offered valuable advice on the document content. I hope the information and observations communicated in this paper will be useful to those who are interested in Asia-Pacific affairs.

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## SUMMARY

Northeast Asia is one of the most volatile regions on the globe, yet dialogue between and among states in the region is limited, for a number of reasons: differences in culture, history, language, economic strength, political systems and military strength. This paper develops the historical explanations, looking at dialogue channels among China, Japan, the two Koreas, and the United States.

In the late 1990s, growing economic relations exist between all the Northeast Asian states (including Taiwan) except for North Korea. A bankrupt Russia is on the sidelines. Strong security alliances link the United States with Japan and with South Korea. The security link between China and North Korea is probably tenuous. High-level government dialogue routinely takes place between all the states with the exception of North Korea. In terms of history—in the Cold War era and the more distant past—China is viewed with respect and suspicion as the big brother of the region, Japan is odd man out as a historically independent state and a 20<sup>th</sup> century colonial aggressor, and the two Koreas are locked in a zero-sum game of political legitimacy.

More extensive dialogue, which has the potential to lower the risk of conflict, will have to await the resolution of Cold War politics: the democratization of China, the reunification of Taiwan with the mainland, and the absorption of North Korea into South Korea. More time will have to pass before the historical memories of aggression, especially Japanese aggression in the first half of the 20th century, have faded. In the meantime, the United States will remain the principal stabilizer and interlocutor in Northeast Asia not by choice but by default.

# THE PROBLEM OF DIALOGUE IN NORTHEAST ASIA

## I. INTRODUCTION

This study was prompted by the observation that the United States is vigorously seeking to open channels of dialogue with North Korea, one of its major security threats. The desire for dialogue is so strong that, in the eyes of some administration critics, it appears that Washington is willing to pay North Korea to participate in talks on the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The Japanese government has also found it difficult to establish dialogue with North Korea, spending the entire decade in a futile attempt to develop dialogue channels. Needless to say, South Korea has been almost completely unsuccessful in initiating South-North dialogue.

Until the financial crisis struck in 1997, Northeast Asia's economy was widely considered to be the most dynamic in the world. At the same time, the region was considered to be one of the greatest threats to world peace, and the final bastion of the Cold War. Yet Northeast Asian governments have made few serious attempts to construct a multilateral security mechanism or dialogue forum. In fact, even bilateral dialogue has been limited. What, then is inhibiting dialogue in Northeast Asia?

A combination of factors has inhibited the formation of dialogue channels. The emphasis in this paper is on two of these factors: the overhang of Cold War politics and the continued effects of historical animosities. The Cold War alignment of states split Northeast Asia right down the middle, with Japan, South Korea and Taiwan on one side and China, North Korea and Russia on the other. Diplomacy and trade between the two sides was limited. But even during the Cold War era dialogue *within* each bloc was limited.

To explain as well the lack of within-bloc dialogue, it is necessary to go farther back in history. Historical memories are well preserved in Asia. China and Korea formed one historical bloc; Japan the other. From ancient times through World War II, periodic fierce conflicts were fought between these two sides. These conflicts have not been forgotten, and as the Cold War ends, they may re-emerge as divisive forces.

If this analysis is correct, the possibility of more extensive and genuine dialogue in Northeast Asia will have to await the resolution of Cold War politics: the democratization of China, the reunification of Taiwan with the mainland, and the absorption of North Korea into South Korea. More time will have to pass before the historical memories of aggression, especially by Japan in the first half of the 20th century, have faded. In the meantime, the United States will remain the principal stabilizer and interlocutor in Northeast Asia.

## II. REALIST, LIBERAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEWPOINTS

Political scientists of the realist school are not much concerned about the presence or absence of dialogue. In their view, the dynamics of international relations is based on the reputation for and exercise of power: the threat of power speaks louder than words. Nations are deemed to be sufficiently rational and informed to calculate their relative power. Admittedly, power cannot be exactly defined, although it certainly includes military and economic power. A state's intentions and willingness to use power are also part of international politics, but they are less important than capabilities, in that intentions can change more quickly than abilities, and in an anarchic every-state-for-itself system, the roster of a state's enemies and friends is likely to change as power balances change. Or to quote the elegant words of Lord Palmerston, "We have no eternal allies and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual."<sup>1</sup>

Realists believe that states are constantly striving to protect and enhance their power. In its modern neorealist form, the view has been advanced that peace is only possible when a balance of power exists, especially between only a few superpowers, who rationally calculate their power positions and realize that they have nothing to gain from attacking an equally powerful state or alliance. Yet the balance of power is always threatening to break down as each state accumulates more power as a hedge against other states, creating a threat spiral that at every turn tempts states to launch preemptive strikes on power rivals.

To take an example of a realist view of the security situation in East Asia, consider Robert S. Ross's "The Geography of Peace."<sup>2</sup> From a geopolitical perspective,

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<sup>1</sup> From Charles Krauthammer, "The Schwarzenberg Principle," *Washington Post*, September 3, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Robert S. Ross, "The Geography of Peace," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Spring 1999), pp. 81-118.

Ross concludes that China is essentially a land-based power—always has been and always will be. The only contending power in the region is the United States, which, with its secure borders, can afford to be a maritime power. (By contrast, China is bordered by 13 countries and has difficulty controlling the ethnic populations of its western provinces.) Russia's geography has always prevented it from projecting power in its far east, and Japan is too dependent on imports to become a great military power. Korea, needless to say, is too small to be a power. Thus, Ross sees the post-Cold War security situation in East Asia as a replay of the U.S.-Soviet confrontation during the Cold War. The United States and China, having different forms of power, balance each other, but because they must continually protect their reputation for power, they dare show no signs of weakness, making the balance unstable at "flash points" such as the Spratly Islands, Taiwan, and Korea.

The realist view has been attacked on several fronts, not least on the grounds of failing to satisfactorily define power and neglecting the role of dialogue. The major contending school of thought in political science is the liberal school, more specifically—in the context of the present concern with dialogue—the neoliberal institutionalists. Whereas realists view institutions—either the formal sort such as the United Nations or less formal "regimes" such as the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC)—as implements of power politics having no independent influence on international relations, institutionalists believe that when states join institutions, state behavior changes in the direction of more cooperation, more restraint, and less conflict. By creating "informational structures" and communication channels, institutions may help states understand and communicate with each other to pursue their security goals.<sup>3</sup> Institutions may entangle their members in a "web of interdependence" that, along with other unintended or unforeseen consequences of institutional membership, influence state behavior. This may happen, for example, when membership in such institutions strengthens domestic constituencies that favor cooperation over confrontation.<sup>4</sup> The signing of the 1994 Agreed Framework between the United States and North Korea

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<sup>3</sup> Robert O. Keohane, "International Institutions: Can Interdependence Work?" *Foreign Policy*, Spring 1998, pp. 82-96.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Jervis, "Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 42-63. The realist-institutionalist battle was joined in two issues of *International Security*—Winter 1994/95 and Summer 1995—the former issue devoted to the realist position, with John J. Mearsheimer taking the lead, and the latter devoted to articles by Robert O. Keohane and Lisa L. Martin, Charles and Clifford Kupchan, John Gerard Ruggie, and Alexander Wendt, with a reply by Mearsheimer.



shifted the mainstream domestic debate from whether or not to confront North Korea to how to maintain the Framework.

As the debate between realists and institutionalists has developed over the years, the blunt question of whether or not institutions influence international behavior has been replaced by the more useful question of what kind of institutions influence state behavior in which contexts. In the search for optimal institutional situations, Keohane has proposed that institutions are most useful when they are dominated by only a few members (reminiscent of the neorealists' view that bipolarity is more stable than multipolarity) and when members share social values and political systems.<sup>5</sup>

Whereas neoliberal political scientists look to institutions for a way to avoid unnecessary conflict in the pursuit of national interests, political psychologists focus on the role of perceptions and intentions of political leaders. There are four major tenets of this "foreign policy decision making model."<sup>6</sup>

1. The primary actors in international relations are policy makers rather than states, and that they act on their own behalf as well as for the good of their states.
2. These individuals are not strictly rational, but operate according to their best view of the situation, a view constrained and colored by their cognitive processing capacity, their perceptual abilities and biases, and their emotions.
3. Information is the greatest form of power, including information about relative abilities and intentions.
4. The international system is not a battleground of contending soldiers, but rather a perceptual map where actors construct their view of the world. This idea is consistent with the views of the constructivists in political science, who believe that the international structure is made of social relationships constructed by their participants.<sup>7</sup>

Consider the shifting views that American policy makers have held toward the Soviet Union and Russia. During World War II, the Russians were our allies. In the Cold War era, they became a mortal enemy and, in Ronald Reagan's view, "the focus of

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<sup>5</sup> Robert O. Keohane, p. 91.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Ripley, "Psychology, Foreign Policy, and International Relations Theory," *Political Psychology*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1993, pp. 403-416.

<sup>7</sup> See for example Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Summer 1995), pp. 71-81.

evil in the modern world.” In the early post-Cold War era, the successor state Russia, which preserved a formidable military capability, was viewed as a benign state struggling to learn capitalism. And then as the Russians tried to assert their own foreign policy views on Yugoslavia, they were again viewed as a threat.

If the international environment is more like an abstract painting than a photograph, the importance of information gathering and communication in international relations is crucial. The unknown tends to be denigrated and feared. As knowledge of other actors increases, it becomes possible to make a more realistic assessment of capabilities and intentions, and since a state’s intelligence and military organizations are likely to inflate threats, better information often reduces threat perceptions. For example, the alarm in 1998 over the nuclear threat posed by North Korea’s Kumchang-ri underground facility was quickly dispelled by an inspection of the site, which proved to be empty.

Better communication may result not only in greater mutual understanding, but in improved relations simply by virtue of the link that is created by the communication channel. Years ago the Gestalt psychologists discovered that “unit” and “sentiment relations” tend to converge toward consistency. When people (and quite possibly states) perceive themselves to be linked (as it might be by a web of interdependence), a motivation develops to perceive each other in positive terms, presumably because it is more comfortable to like one’s partners and neighbors than to hate them.

Anyone other than the materialistic realist who believes that power somehow speaks for itself can see the need for some form of dialogue between states, yet surprisingly little dialogue is conducted among Northeast Asian states, especially in comparison to the dialogue within Europe and between Europe and the United States. In order for communication to take place, not only must channels be available but the “atmospherics” must be conducive to dialogue. This is what is missing in the region. In this paper, four factors likely to influence dialogue—cultural, economic, political and military—will be examined for each of the six channels linking the two Koreas, China, and Japan. Although Russia is a regional presence, it has not played a significant direct role in Northeast Asia in either the Cold War or post-Cold War period, although this may change in the future. Taiwan is an important East Asian economic power, but because it is widely considered to be a part of China, it does not have an independent role to play in regional dialogue. U. S. communication channels with the regional states will also be considered in a separate section.

### **III. CHANNEL FACTORS**

The degree to which a channel can facilitate communication depends on such specifics as which offices are linked by the channel and who staffs those offices. Summit meetings, in which much preparation and prestige is invested, often lead to agreements where lower-level bureaucrat-level dialogue stalls. This is especially the case when the leaders share a mutual liking and respect, for example in the Ronald Reagan-Yasuhiro Nakasone ("Ron-Yasu") relationship. Broader background factors also play an important role by facilitating or inhibiting communication. For example, in the absence of shared cultural concepts, meaningful communication will be impeded. Such is the case between the United States and North Korea, which share a keen appreciation of the ways and means of Realpolitik but adhere to almost diametrically opposed political and economic values. In the paragraphs that follow, the important channel factors will be presented in the abstract, to be examined more specifically in the later discussion of specific bilateral channels.

#### **A. Culture**

Broadly defined, culture is the way people view the world, with this view encompassing beliefs and values as well as specific behaviors, from how to eat to how to fight. The East Asian countries share a similar Asian culture, which differs in important respects from European-based Western culture. Western culture is more individualistic; Asian is more collective. Thus, Westerners emphasize the human rights of the individual, whereas Asians emphasize the collective rights of society. Western culture is more democratic; Asian is more hierarchic. Hence Westerners are more likely to favor competitive economic environments and Asians more ordered economies. In terms of dialogue style, Westerners often feel constrained when dealing with Asians because their culture is more rule-ordered, and learning the rules is extremely difficult for foreigners. Asians tend to be disoriented by Western culture, which, compared with Asian culture, seems to have few rules and little structure. In meetings, Americans—with the exception of the overbearing imperialist types—sometimes feel like bulls in a China shop. Asians—in the absence of a recognized hierarchy and agenda—tend to play it safe and keep silent.

History is the source of culture, and how history is viewed is an important cultural factor, since history has both its objective and subjective aspects. Americans, who have a short and very cosmopolitan history, tend to pay little attention to history. United States'

relations with Asia date back only a little more than a hundred years, but even those relations are considered to be remote and irrelevant, whether it is Commodore Perry's "black ships" forcing trade on Japan or the Taft-Katsura agreement giving Korea to Japan. One page of more recent history that remains vivid to Americans in terms of its inferred meaning is the Korean War, less because of wartime events (after all, the Korean War has often been called America's "forgotten war") than because it represented the prototypical Cold War conflict, and the war-like atmosphere along the Demilitarized Zone has continued into the present.

Within Northeast Asia, history still plays an important—sometimes it seems even a controlling—role in perception. China cannot forget that for much of its recorded history it was the "middle kingdom," with its neighbors properly paying allegiance in a hierarchical world order. Koreans in both halves of the peninsula cannot forget the many times that foreigners—Westerners as well as Chinese and Japanese—forced themselves into Korea. The Japanese are proud of their history of independence, refined culture and early modernization, but seem to have expunged from their collective conscious much of the memory of their cruel conduct of World War II.

Language is an important aspect of culture, and particularly important in facilitating or inhibiting dialogue. Chinese, Japanese and Koreans (at least the older generation of Koreans) share a similar Chinese writing system, which is combined with indigenous Japanese and Korean alphabets. In spoken language many Korean and Japanese pronunciations derive from the Chinese, but Korean and Japanese are more similar to each other in syntax than they are to the Chinese, which is from a different language group. Needless to say, neither the written nor spoken languages of Northeast Asia have much in common with the Latin-Anglo-Saxon-based English language.

## **B. Social and Economic Factors**

Great discrepancies in size of geography and population are a potential inhibitor of smooth communications between states, just as differences in wealth and status inhibit communication between people. For the hierarchical Asians, such differences suggest a structured rather than open or free-ranging dialogue. Also, since size translates into political and military power, potential threats are perceived, making the smaller countries more cautious in their expressions.

### **C. Political Factors**

Differences in political systems impose an obvious barrier to communication, as they imply different goals. Dialogue between democratic and nondemocratic states is often seen by the latter as seeking to undermine their stability and spread democracy, in the same way that during the Cold War democratic states were suspicious of communist revolutionary intentions.

### **D. Military Balance**

As with economic power, discrepancies in military power can breed distrust on the basis of the fear that the power may be used coercively. The potential for coercion may prompt vociferous warnings and saber rattling (North Korea being an obvious case) while imposing constraints on transparency of expression (loose lips sink ships).

## **IV. CHANNELS AT DIFFERENT HISTORICAL PERIODS**

In the 19th century, and for many centuries before, China was the center of Asia, and its relations stretched out to peripheral nations like the spokes of a wheel, not unlike America's relations with its allies in the latter half of the 20th century, which former Secretary of State James Baker picturesquely characterized as a "fan spread wide, with its base in North America and radiating west across the Pacific."<sup>8</sup> As a peninsular state, Korea had closer relations with China than did insular Japan. Throughout much of Korean history an annual tribute party would travel from the Korean capital to Beijing to present gifts to the Chinese emperor, and new Korean rulers would seek the blessing of the emperor. As the wheel-and-spokes analogy suggests, relations between Japan and Korea were not close. At the end of the 19th century China's power had slipped away. Taking advantage of China's weakness, Western nations intruded into Northeast Asia. Korea was the last state to open its borders, and the three neighboring powers—China, Russia and Japan—all tried to achieve dominant influence on the Korean peninsula. Japan successfully fought wars against China in 1895 and Russia in 1905 to win the Korean prize, and in 1910 Korea was annexed by Japan.

The pattern of Cold War relations in Northeast Asia was not as simple as it sometimes appeared from Washington. The United States allied itself closely with Japan,

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<sup>8</sup> James A. Baker, III, "American in Asia: Emerging Architecture for a Pacific Community," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 5 (Winter 1991/92), pp. 1-18.

and secondarily, with South Korea. Japan and South Korea established diplomatic relations in 1965, but were never close. North Korea nominally allied itself with China and the Soviet Union, but these relationships were less close and stable than South Korea's relationship with the United States. At times North Korea sided with China, and at other times with the Soviet Union, reflecting the fact that China and the Soviet Union were often at odds.

When the Soviet Union broke apart and China began adopting capitalist reforms, the regional Cold War structure broke down. North Korea lost its Russian connection as Russia began embracing democracy and tried to run its economy on market principles. North Korea could not draw too close to China because the Chinese were downgrading communist ideology just at the time when North Korea's leaders were placing more emphasis on ideology in order to bolster their regime. Since the newly isolated North Korea continued to harbor extreme suspicion and animosity toward the West, it had little success in making new friends, although for power balancing purposes it sought to forge a formal relationship with the United States in order to weaken U.S. ties with South Korea and Japan. U.S.-China relations improved slightly, but China's growing economic and military power alarmed the United States. China-Japan and China-South Korea economic relations improved. The upshot was that the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-South Korea alliances remained strong while the China-Russia-North Korea alliance broke apart.

## **V. THE CHANNELS**

### **A. China-Japan**

Throughout most of its history, Japan has remained independent from China, although much of Japanese culture came from China, often by way of Korea. Japan's history is one of isolation except in times of Japanese conquest. In historical times Japanese pirates raided the Chinese coast, and in the 19th century Japan joined the Western powers in carving out niches of influence in China. After World War I, as one of the world's great powers, Japan continued her advance into China, finally launching full-scale attacks in Manchuria in 1931 and in China proper in 1938, but never subduing the vast Chinese territory. The cruelty of Japanese troops, especially in the rape of Nanjing, will be long remembered by the Chinese.

The two countries established diplomatic relations in 1972, coinciding with U.S.-China detente. Although trade and Japanese investment in China is substantial, the

Japanese are not liked by many Chinese, who consider them historical aggressors and potential future aggressors allied with the United States. The defensive precautions taken by Japan against North Korean threats, most notably consideration of a theater missile defense system, are seen by the Chinese as a possible threat to their regaining Taiwan if the defense system should be extended to that island.<sup>9</sup>

## **B. China-South Korea**

Korea and China are historically very close. Although the Korean peninsula lies in the far northeast of China, it was not too far from Beijing for the Chinese to bring it into their sphere of influence. From at least the first century B.C., China exercised influence over all or part of the peninsula, establishing colonial outposts among the Mongolian-related Korean people, much like the Romans built colonies in the northern part of Europe at the same time in history. Even as they remained largely autonomous, Korean kingdoms were smaller replicas of Chinese kingdoms, since China was considered the font of world culture.

In 1231 the Mongols overran Korea, as they were overrunning much of Asia and eastern Europe. When the Mongol empire in China collapsed, the Yi or Choson dynasty arose in Korea to begin its 700-year rule (until the late 19th century), adopting tributary relations with the Ming and then the Ching dynasties in China. During this period the Koreans fought off a major invasion from the Japanese in the late 16th century and a Manchu invasion from northern China in the early 17th century. Even more so than neighboring China and Japan, Korea remained isolated from foreign contact and failed to benefit from the scientific advances sweeping through Europe beginning in the 15th century. As the Europeans made increasingly vigorous intrusions into East Asia in the 18th and 19th centuries, Korea found itself unable to withstand colonial pressures to open itself to trade and diplomacy. In the final years of the Yi dynasty, China attempted to preserve her special position in Korea against the incursions of the Japanese and Russians, but lost out to the Japanese, who made Korea a colony in 1910.

Korea's historical and cultural relations with China are in some sense similar to the United States' relations with Great Britain. British culture provided the foundation of American culture, and even though the Americans fought two wars with the British early

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<sup>9</sup> Chinese views on Japan, based on historical and contemporary factors, are well described by Thomas J. Christensen in "China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Spring 1999), pp. 49-80.

in their history, the two peoples have remained close. Although the inauguration of a communist government in China in 1949 changed relations between China and South Korea, up to that time, and later as the strength of communism waned in China, Koreans probably felt closer to the Chinese than to any other people.

Undoubtedly the greatest barrier to dialogue and good relations between South Korea and China has been communism. China sent a million soldiers to aid North Korea in the Korean War, and for years afterward South Koreans feared China as a state seeking to spread communism to other states. But with the coming of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms in the late 1970s, the Chinese threat to South Korea subsided, and by the end of the 1990s, despite the adherence of the oligarchs in Beijing to authoritarian communism, China was increasingly viewed by South Korea as a partner in the campaign to bring changes to communist North Korea.

Yet the great size of China is reason for South Koreans to be wary. Relations between China and South Korea, or even a larger reunified Korea, may well become like those between Canada and the United States, friendly yet marred at times by anger over American dominance of the continent. South Korea today is more aware of this future relationship than many in the West may suppose. American military strategists often criticize South Korea for spending too much money on advanced air and naval weapons and not enough on improving ground forces to complement U.S. air and sea forces in the region. But the South Koreans are looking ahead to the time when they will no longer have to repulse a North Korean attack. As a reunified country without a U.S. force presence, they will need modern military forces to balance those of Japan and China.

Since diplomatic relations were established in 1992, economic relations between China and South Korea have become close, although political relations are slower in developing.<sup>10</sup> Since 1992 the two countries have held 7 summit meetings and 29 rounds of talks between foreign ministers. South Korea and China are each other's third largest trading partners. At the end of 1998 1,500 South Korean trading companies were operating in China, and 35,000 business people and students were living there. China is the second largest destination for South Korean foreign investment, totaling \$6.2 billion by September 1998 (compared with only \$41 million in Chinese investment in South

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<sup>10</sup> Ch'oe Yong-chae, "Economic Exchange is Active, but Political Exchange is Sluggish." *Sisa Journal* (Chollian database version), 26 August 1999; translated by FBIS on September 6, 1999, and entitled "Seven Years of ROK-PRC Relations Viewed," sourceline SK0609040599. Statistics are from this article.



Korea). South Koreans are the second largest group of foreign tourists to visit China (following the Japanese). A Korean ethnic population of almost two million lives in the northeastern provinces of China.

In the late 1990s South Korea's relations with China have been improving, but as long as the Chinese Communist Party remains in power, political barriers will provide a deciding restraint on relations between the two countries.

### **C. China-North Korea**

Like South Korea, North Korea shares a common culture and history with China. In fact, being closer to the Chinese border, the northern part of Korea has had historically more contacts with China than has the southern half. But by the same token, during those periods when Korea was trying to assert its independence, it was the northern areas of the peninsula that were more likely to suffer from Chinese attacks. The largely unfortified border that North Korea shares with China is relatively porous, allowing traders from the two countries to cross by bribing border guards. In the 1990s, as many as 200,000 hungry North Koreans have fled across the border into China, which by treaty agreement tries to see that they are returned to the North. As fellow members of the Cold War communist bloc, China and North Korea supported each other politically against what they saw as the hegemonic designs of the Soviet Union. China's rescue of North Korea in the Korean War was characterized by both sides as "sealing their relationship in blood" and making their relationship as close as "lips and teeth." Just as the two have stood against Soviet hegemony, today they are vigilant toward American hegemony in the region and the United States' professed desire to spread liberal democracy and the market economy to other nations. As most of the communist bloc countries turned away from communism, China became by default North Korea's strongest—and virtually only—supporter. Chinese aid and trade have guaranteed that even in hard times North Korea can survive.

Yet the relationship is under strain, and few high-level delegations have traveled between the two capitals in the 1990s. China was never as closed a society as North Korea, and beginning with Deng Xiaoping's reforms, a gap in political and economic policy opened between the two countries. Whereas North Korea clung to its 1950s Stalinist economic policies and intensified the personality cult of its leaders, China embraced a hybrid capitalist-socialist economic model and turned away from the cult of Mao. The Chinese urged North Korea to follow their lead in making economic reforms, but the North Koreans refused, and consequently their economy deteriorated. This refusal

to reform its economy and open it to outside investment reflected three concerns. First, because North Korea is a much smaller country than China, it is more vulnerable to destabilizing change by outside forces. Second, because the security of the North Korean regime, as buttressed by the cult of the leader, is North Korea's primary policy objective, any opening to the truth from the outside world would weaken the regime. Third, North Korea's leadership-sanctified ideology of *Juche*, most often translated as "self-reliant nationalism," dictates that North Korea remain nominally independent from all foreign influences, including those of the Chinese. In official North Korean historiography, the Korean War was "won" by the efforts of their founder and president, Kim Il Sung, with the Chinese playing only a peripheral role.

At the leadership level, Mao, Deng and Kim Il Sung shared similar revolutionary experiences. Kim had fought the Japanese in China as a soldier in a Korean contingent attached to the Chinese army in the late 1930s before his band of soldiers was forced to take refuge in Siberia. But with the death of the senior leaders in China and North Korea, a new generation of leaders has not established a close relationship. China has never approved of the dynastic succession of Kim Il Sung's son, Kim Jong Il, who took over the reins of power after his father's death in 1994, and who has yet to make an official visit to China (although a state visit is said to be planned for late 1999).

North Korea seeks to achieve substantial self-reliance and independence, but it knows it must continue to depend on China for aid and political support for the foreseeable future. Yet China is becoming increasingly tired of the North Korean financial burden. Beijing is also concerned that North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles, as well as its frequent provocations against South Korea, will trigger an arms race in Japan and South Korea. The North's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction may even become such a threat to its neighbors and to American nonproliferation policy that a preemptive attack is launched against North Korean facilities, igniting a war on China's doorstep. China has long since abandoned its goal of spreading communism beyond its borders, seeking instead a peaceful environment in which it can develop its economy. Chinese discontent with North Korea has reached the point where a visiting U.S. congressional delegation was told that "China is a neighbor but not an ally of North Korea."<sup>11</sup> Yet the China-North Korea security alliance

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<sup>11</sup> Report by Tu-sik Pak, *Choson Ilbo*, April 17, 1997, p. 2; translated by FBIS on April 18, 1997, and entitled "Li Peng: DPRK Is Not Ally or Enemy of PRC, Only Neighbor," sourceline SK1704031497.

remains in force, providing North Korea with its only security guarantee since the lapse of its treaty with Russia in 1996 (a new treaty with Russia, presumably without a military intervention clause, is set to be signed in late 1999).

#### **D. Japan-South Korea**

It has often been said that Korea and Japan are so close and yet so far. Close in terms of distance—separated at their closest point by little more than a hundred miles of water—yet having radically different historical experiences. The Japanese received much of their culture from China, by way of Korea, but the Koreans have gained little respect for their intermediary role. Japan developed as an independent island state, whereas throughout most of its history Korea was affiliated with China.

Both Japan and South Korea are capitalist, democratic states, setting them apart from China and North Korea. In the face of the Cold War threat of revolutionary communism, South Korea, with its U.S. troops, provided a buffer for Japan against China and the Soviet Union. Japan, in turn, provided a rear base for the protection of South Korea—an “unsinkable aircraft carrier” in the memorable words of Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone. Although the two countries were not Cold War allies, they were indirectly linked by their bilateral security alliances with the United States.

South Korea and Japan established diplomatic relations in 1965, ending the formal hostility of the Japanese colonial period, but not the hostility felt by many Koreans, who staged massive demonstrations against their government for taking this step. South Korea—always some years behind Japan economically—looked to Japan for its economic model, with President Park Chung Hee borrowing Korea’s government-large conglomerate model of development directly from Japan. In the early years of Korean industrialization, Japan also provided South Korea with most of its capital equipment.

The fact that both countries developed along the same path, with South Korea lagging behind Japan, gave rise to intense economic competition. The Japanese worried about a “boomerang effect” by which the technology they sold to Korea in the form of patents and capital goods would be used by the Koreans to compete in the same industries as Japan. In fact, in some major industries such as ship building and computers, the Koreans eventually surpassed the Japanese in sales. While contributing much to the Korean economy, Japan has also withheld its latest technologies. This action is

sometimes viewed in Korea not as a prudent business practice but as a latter-day form of colonialism, with Japan seeking to keep Korean industry dependent.

Just as a difference in political systems separates South Korea from China, so the issue of historical aggression separates South Korea from Japan. During the 35-year colonial period, beginning in 1910, the Japanese modernized the Korean infrastructure—for the purpose of using Korea as a supply base for Japan. Food and industrial goods were shipped to Japan, and the Korean people were treated as second-class Japanese citizens. Some 800,000 Koreans were brought to Japan to work in the most difficult occupations, and tens of thousands of Korean women were taken to the Japanese front lines during World War II to provide sexual services for Japanese troops. Japan has made several apologies to Korea for its imperial transgressions, but many Japanese still do not feel guilt for what they have done, not only to Korea but to other East Asian countries, viewing their activities as a form of modernization and emancipation from Western domination. Perhaps the important question is whether any form of apology can bring Koreans to forgive the Japanese or whether only time will dim the memories.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, although Japan was forced by the United States occupation administration to adopt a non-aggression or “peace constitution” after the war, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces have grown over the years into the most modern military force in East Asia, barring U.S. forces. Some Koreans are uncomfortable with this potent military capability in the hands of a former aggressor.

#### **E. Japan-North Korea**

The divide that separates the Japanese and North Korean people is attested to by the fact that normalization talks between their two governments did not begin until 1991, and as of 1999 the on-and-off-again talks have made no measurable progress, even though both governments continue to see advantages in normalization. Many Koreans loyal to North Korea live in Japan, and until the 1990s were more active in their loyalties than were their resident South Korean counterparts: the North Korean members of *Chochongnyon* (*Chosen Soren*) have their own schools and businesses, and remit hundreds of millions of dollars a year to their North Korean homeland. *Chochongnyon* has often served as an unofficial ambassador between the two countries. But there has

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<sup>12</sup> The continued hostility of Chinese and Koreans toward the Japanese, and the seeming inability of them to accept any form of apology, is recounted by Nicholas D. Kristof in “The Problem of Memory,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 77, No. 6 (November/December 1998), pp. 37-49.

been a serious falling off of *Chochongnyon* membership in the 1990s as later generations of resident Koreans took Japanese citizenship, and as they lost patience with the anachronistic views and policies of North Korea.

North Korea shares with South Korea the same unfortunate historical legacy of Japanese aggression, for which the more independent-minded North Koreans are even more unforgiving. The North Koreans have often warned Japan that unless a suitable apology is made for past crimes, backed up with a large compensation payment, and unless Japan pulls out of the U.S.-Japan security alliance, which is obviously targeted at North Korea, the North Koreans will repay Japan "a thousand-fold" for the injury it has done to North Korea since the beginning of the colonial period.

The Japanese government has repeatedly made diplomatic overtures to North Korea in hopes of defusing such threats and establishing diplomatic relations, but the hostility of the Japanese people toward Koreans in general and North Koreans in particular has been too great a barrier for consensus-minded governments to overcome. Many North Korean issues are highly emotional to the Japanese, such as the alleged kidnapping of a handful of young women in scattered cases over the last 15 years by North Korean commandos, who seem to routinely land on Japanese beaches. On August 31, 1998, the North Koreans launched their first three-stage rocket over Japan and out into the Pacific, which so unnerved the Japanese people that the launch seems to have ended any possibility of establishing diplomatic ties in the foreseeable future.

#### **F. South Korea-North Korea**

The phrase "so close but yet so far" applies even better to inter-Korean relations than to Korean-Japanese relations. The closeness can be attributed to the facts that the two states are linked together geographically on the same peninsula, are a culturally homogeneous people (albeit with a long history of regional rivalry *within* each of the halves of the country), and for most of their history have faced common enemies. Millions of families were separated by the partition of the peninsula and by the Korean War. In both North and South Korea the ultimate national objective is to achieve reunification.

Yet the political differences imposed by the Cold War and by the desire of the governments in Seoul and Pyongyang to preserve their ruling positions has delayed reunification indefinitely. The contest of wills between the two Koreas is best understood on the basis of three factors. First, having suffered from the surprise attack beginning the

Korean War, the South Koreans will never again trust North Korea's offers of peaceful reunification. Second, having failed to build a socialist system that could provide for the welfare of its people, the Pyongyang government cannot afford to enter into a close relationship with South Korea that would reveal to the North Korean people the shortcomings of their government. And third, the independent-minded North Koreans will not consider the South Korean government to be a legitimate government with which to hold dialogue until U.S. troops are removed from South Korea.

Although the two Korean governments are far apart in their positions, they have gone through the motions of trying to reconcile, and these attempts have periodically raised the hopes of their people. The first formal attempt at reconciliation occurred in 1972, when after a series of meetings the two governments signed the July 4th Joint Communiqué in which they agreed to carry out "various exchanges in many fields" according to the three principles of independence, peace, and national unity. Of course the Pyongyang government could not under any circumstances permit the free flow of people and ideas across its borders, so the communiqué came to nothing. It did, however, achieve Pyongyang's goal of making "independence" as stipulated in the communiqué a basis of reunification, interpreted by the North Koreans as an agreement on the part of South Korea to end its alliance with the United States. The 1972 reconciliation initiative was replayed almost 20 years later when, after another series of talks, the two sides signed an Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation in 1991. This document provided for even more extensive social exchanges than the 1972 document, and became a dead letter as soon as it was signed.

The only change that has occurred in the reunification environment in the post-Cold War era is that the North Koreans seem to have abandoned their revolutionary goal of reuniting the peninsula by force under communism (although they still threaten this from time to time). Instead, they seek a separate-but-equal confederacy arrangement that would guarantee their failed state protection from the threat of South Korean absorption. But the level of xenophobia in the North is so great that Pyongyang views any overture as a Trojan horse, even South Korean President Kim Dae Jung's 1998 promise not to absorb North Korea and the offer to provide economic aid in return for the Northern government's permission for meetings between divided families. Government-to-government relations have been virtually frozen. In their place, both sides have

communicated through "track two"<sup>13</sup> channels—non-government organizations in the South and quasi-government organizations in the North, along with business contacts.

Seoul's track two goal is to open up North Korea despite the resistance of its government; Pyongyang's goal is to employ traditional "united front" tactics to isolate the South Korean government. In short, political interests and mutual suspicion have almost entirely swamped cultural affinities on the Korean peninsula.

## **G. Regional Overview**

China is the big brother of the other east Asian countries, and suffers the same reputation as any big brother—admired but also feared. Its sheer size will keep its neighbors on edge, even in the absence of aggressive actions, which in any case are not historically characteristic of the Chinese.

Japan is and always has been odd man out in East Asia, accepted only by South Korea, and then only as a trade partner and indirect ally against communist aggression. Although Japan shares much of Asian culture, it adopted Western science earlier than its neighbors, excelling in this but also reinforcing the Japanese mentality of superiority. Japan is a valuable trade partner and investment source for its neighbors, but with its past reputation and its peace constitution, an unlikely security partner.

The two Koreas are locked in a zero-sum game of political legitimacy. No amicable relations can be expected between the two until the totalitarian government in the North collapses. Because the two countries constantly threaten each other—intentionally on the part of North Korea and unintentionally on the part of South Korea—their relations with other countries are dictated by a political calculus. The two governments try to balance each other's foreign policies. The 1991 agreement, for example, could be seen as Pyongyang's attempt to curry favor with the United States to balance South Korea's growing diplomacy with China and the Soviet Union. South

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<sup>13</sup> The term, coined by Davidson and Montville in 1981, refers to unofficial dialogue by non-government people or government people in their private capacity. McDonald has gone farther, distinguishing five different tracks: Track One, regular diplomatic interaction; Track Two, interaction by non-government issue specialists; Track Three, business-to-business contact; Track Four, citizen-to-citizen exchange programs; and Track Five, media-based efforts to educate and inform about transcultural issues. (See Edward E. Azar, John L. Davies, Anthony F. Pickering, and Hossein A. Shahbazi, "Track Two Diplomacy: Process and Critique," in Joseph B. Gittler, ed., *The Annual Review of Conflict Knowledge and Conflict Resolution*, Volume 2 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990), pp. 269-303.) The second through fourth tracks are included in the usual meaning of Track Two, although its prototypical form is McDonald's second track.

Korea's 1998 "sunshine policy" of engagement with North Korea may be in part a response to Pyongyang's attempts to take advantage of Washington's engagement policy. Once Korean reunification is achieved, Korea will have to find its place between two greater powers—one greater in size and the other greater in economic development.

## **VI. THE UNITED STATES IN NORTHEAST ASIA**

What of the United States' channels of dialogue with Northeast Asia? Americans are clearly outsiders, no matter how cosmopolitan they believe themselves to be. Americans are viewed with some suspicion throughout Asia. During the Cold War this suspicion was muted by fears of communist aggression on the part of Japan, South Korea, and other non-communist states. In the post-Cold War era the threat of war in Northeast Asia remains, thanks to North Korea, and for this reason the Japanese and South Koreans consider a continued American security presence to be necessary. The United States is not feared as a traditional colonial power by these two countries, but America is and always has been viewed as an economic hegemon. China likewise does not fear an American attack, but it does fear the soft power of American political and social influence that would weaken the ruling communist regime, and worries about American interference with China's bid to regain Taiwan. North Korea fears American soft power as well—calling it the "yellow wind of capitalism"—but an even greater fear is that the United States might launch one of the surgical air strikes it is so famous for, virtually forcing a North Korean response that would likely trigger a suicidal war.

In terms of historical background, throughout Asia the United States is still remembered for its colonial-style opening of Japan, China, and Korea during its late 19th century days. This image persists even though the United States deferred to Japan in 1905 by signing the Taft-Katsura agreement, which gave Japan hegemony in Korea in return for an American free hand in the Philippines. World War II is still seen by some Japanese as a case of American aggression to protect Western colonies in Asia and prevent Japan from extending a modernizing influence over its Asian neighbors.

China remembers America's Cold War containment policy, the American counterattack in the Korea War up to the Chinese border, and the long-standing commitment of the United States to protect Taiwan.

Many South Koreans remember the forceful opening of Korea by the United States in the late 19th century, America's abandonment of Korea to the Japanese by the self-serving Taft-Katsura agreement, and the U.S. support for a series of authoritarian



military governments that oppressed many South Koreans until the late 1980s. Yet the strongest memory is of the United States coming to the aid of South Korea in the Korean War, and the military and economic support provided in the succeeding years.

North Koreans have the bitterest memories. Their history has been rewritten to expunge the role the United States played in liberating Korea from the Japanese. The United States is charged with being the major culprit in the partition of Korea after the liberation, and of launching the Korean War (known in North Korea as the Fatherland Liberation War) in an attempt to protect its illegitimate client government in the southern half of the peninsula.

Although Western—largely American—culture is spreading rapidly throughout Asia, among the older generations at least the individualistic norms of American culture are seen as socially destabilizing and excessively commercial. Many Asians feel that as Western culture intrudes, they will lose their cultural identity and become inferior copies of America. Americans as a self-sufficient insular people (compared with Europeans) have disdained learning the language and culture of other countries, projecting their influence through economic and military power. This lack of cultural sensitivity has not endeared them to the Asian peoples.

## **VII. THE NEXT DECADE**

North Korea's economic and political position appears to be unsustainable. At such time as the current regime collapses, North Korea will be absorbed by South Korea, and the emergence of a united Korea is likely to change regional alignments. Without a North Korean threat, Korea is likely to improve relations with China, especially as China's commitment to communism wanes. The U.S.-Korean security alliance will be downgraded. Japan will face two regional economic and military competitors—Korea and China—who are at peace with each other and who both harbor historical grudges against Japan. A movement toward the alignment of historical times may take place, with Korea and China moving closer together, and Japan isolated. In this event, Japan will have little choice but to continue to align itself with the United States, which will find its power in the region considerably diminished. Whether Russia will be able to rejuvenate its economy and regain control of its far east remains a question.

### VIII. THE CASE FOR MULTILATERALISM

With the end of the bipolar Cold War system, the rise of neoliberal thinking in international relations, and the model of the European Union, NATO and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), a growing literature on prospects for multilateral regimes has addressed the problem of the limited regional dialogue in East Asia, especially Northeast Asia. The argument of this paper is that an important cause of this lack of dialogue is historical animosities, which outweigh the demands that current national interests place on initiating dialogue as a confidence-building measure. Over the years, but especially since the end of the Cold War, a number of government-level multilateral security and economic organizations have been suggested by various East Asian countries. Examples would be proposals for a Northeast Asian security forum by President Gorbachev in 1986 and 1988, Foreign Minister Shevardnaze in 1990, South Korean President Roh Tae-woo in 1988 and 1991, Mongolia in 1989, Australia in 1990, and Canada at about the same time. More recently, Japan has proposed expanding the Four Party Talks (see below) to include itself and Russia. It is noteworthy that none of these suggestions came from the two major powers, China and the United States.<sup>14</sup>

Multilateral dialogue through government-level institutions seems unlikely in Northeast Asia for a variety of reasons. First, and perhaps most important, the level of distrust and animosity existing between a number of the states in the region would make it difficult to achieve a well-functioning dialogue forum. Second, the countries face no common threat that would bind them together. Third, since any strong multilateral mechanism would place constraints on the two major powers in the region—China and the United States—it has not been supported by them. As the largest regional power, China likely believes that sooner or later it will be able to achieve its goals through pressure or peaceful influence, without the necessity of achieving regional consensus. The United States thinks of itself more as a leader than as a participant. Fourth, unlike Europe, Northeast Asia has few players, and their interests have traditionally been separate from those of Southeast Asia. With only a few players, whatever policy coordination is necessary can be arranged by bilateral dialogue or by ad hoc multilateral dialogue. Fifth, insofar as membership is concerned, Taiwan, a major power, would find it difficult to gain admission to any forum in which China was a member. North Korea,

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<sup>14</sup> In-bae Lee, "The Retrospect and Prospects on Cooperative Security in East Asia," *East Asian Review*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Autumn 1998), pp. 21-37.

on the other hand, could be legitimately admitted, but its anti-establishment views would make it a spoiler in almost any forum.

The existence of multiple barriers to the formation of a strong multilateral framework does not mean that multilateralism as a concept is impractical. Northeast Asia has several multilateral forums. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is an attempt to include Northeast Asian countries in security dialogue, but the idea of making ARF, headed by weak Southeast Asian countries, an important forum is not viable. ASEAN in any case is hardly an appealing model, since it has failed to address the problems and crises in its own region. APEC, an economic regime providing a forum for countries around the Pacific Rim—in North and South America as well as Asia—is too broad to provide more than publicity opportunities for its participants.

Since security issues are potentially the most contentious of international issues, it has been suggested that multilateralism begin with the less sensitive economic issues.<sup>15</sup> This, after all, is how the European Union got its start. Another suggestion is to avoid what Manning and Przystup term “ethereal multilateralism”—the creation of “vague dialogue” to reduce misunderstanding and mistrust—in favor of “functional multilateralism”—a dialogue mechanism to address specific issues in which the dialogue partners have overlapping interests.<sup>16</sup>

One example of functional multilateralism would be the periodic “trilateral meetings” between military representatives of the United States, Japan and South Korea to discuss the North Korean threat. A second example is the Four Party Talks, comprising China, the United States, and the two Koreas, which were formed to seek a way to replace the Korean War armistice with a peace agreement. Predictably, the talks are in reality two-party talks between the United States and North Korea, with China lending its presence as a signatory to the original armistice who would prefer not to get involved, and South Korea treated as an illegitimate puppet government by North Korea. Desmond Ball provides a list of many, less institutionalized security mechanism

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<sup>15</sup> Amitav Acharya, “A Concert of Asia?” *Survival*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Autumn 1999), pp. 84-101.

<sup>16</sup> Robert A. Manning and James J. Przystup, “Asia’s Transition Diplomacy: Hedging Against Futureshock,” *Survival*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Autumn 1999), pp. 43-67, see p. 62.

proposals, such as intelligence exchanges, regional arms register, hot lines, workshops, and joint military exercises.<sup>17</sup>

The idea of functional multilateralism conflicts with Malaysia's Mahathir Mohamad's recommendation that, given the importance of relationships among Asians, "we must [first] build . . . a Pacific *Gemeinschaft*, a Pacific village or family or group of friends, not an artificial, Cartesian construct—over-legalistic, over-structured and over-institutionalized."<sup>18</sup>

The lack of success in establishing multilateral dialogue, and the impoverished nature of government-to-government bilateral dialogue in Northeast Asia, suggest greater reliance on track two dialogue. In the security area, the best-known ongoing track-two effort is the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP). It was founded at the suggestion of South Korea at the seventh meeting of the Asia-Pacific Roundtable (sponsored by the Malaysian Institute of Strategic and International Studies) in 1993. The 10 original members from the roundtable represented non-governmental security organizations from Australia, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, the United States (the Pacific Forum and the Institute for Strategic and International Studies), Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. The European Union and India hold affiliate membership. The viability of CSCAP is indicated by the fact that it was joined by New Zealand in 1994, Russia and North Korea in 1995, and China and Vietnam in 1996. CSCAP holds meetings twice a year and makes recommendations on regional confidence building to ARF.<sup>19</sup>

## IX. CONCLUSIONS

Four of the major world powers face each other in Northeast Asia: China, Japan, Russia, and the United States. North Korea, the last hard-line Stalinist regime, constantly threatens to destabilize the region. Taiwan, one of the world's richest nations, is essentially bereft of nationality. And a bitter colonial and wartime legacy of memories is alive in China and the two Koreas. The potential for instability is great, but these neighboring countries have made no concerted effort to establish a regional forum to

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<sup>17</sup> Desmond Ball, "A New Era in Confidence Building: The Second-track Process in the Asia/Pacific Region," *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1994), pp. 157-176.

<sup>18</sup> Pauline Kerr, "The Security Dialogue in the Asia-Pacific," *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (1994), pp. 397-409, see p. 408.

<sup>19</sup> In-bae Lee.

discuss issues and negotiate disputes. By default the Cold War presence of the United States continues to provide a major stabilizing effect in the region, but this presence is unlikely to function as well in the post-Cold War future.

Apart from track-two channels, the links between the regional powers can be summarized as follows: adequate economic relations exist between all the Northeast Asian states (including Taiwan) except for North Korea, which pursues an autarkic economic model and is in any case bankrupt. Russia, also bankrupt, is on the sidelines. Strong security alliances link the United States with Japan and with South Korea. The treaty link between China and North Korea is probably tenuous. High-level government dialogue routinely takes place between all the states with the exception of dialogue with North Korea.

Important reasons for the lack of a multilateral security or economic forum include (1) historic animosities and contemporary distrust; (2) no common threat, and thus no overriding common security interest; (3) the desire by the largest powers, China and the United States, to maintain a free hand by not sharing power with smaller states; (4) the inability of the small number of states in the region to conduct necessary dialogue on a bilateral basis; and (5) the problem of inclusion and exclusion: North Korea as a spoiler in any organization, and Taiwan as an ineligible member.

A measure of the contemporary distrust is likely to subside once the problem states of Taiwan and North Korea are reunited with their respective partners. The problem of historic animosities against Japan is likely to linger. Whether the cultural divide between the United States and Asia will widen or narrow is difficult to predict. Once reunification has been achieved in Northeast Asia, and after communism has weakened in China, a more confident Northeast Asia may have less need for close ties with the United States. On the other hand, as globalization continues, American culture may become more accepted in the region, bringing Asia closer to America.

In the meantime, the lack of regional dialogue may well incur some costs, although it is difficult to know how high these costs may be. One cost is the trouble-making potential of North Korea. It is not unreasonable to suppose that even an independent-minded North Korean regime would be more constrained in its policy lines in the face of a united front from all its neighbors. Another cost is imposed by U.S. policy, which, coming from the sole remaining superpower, is both global and regional. The United States has a realist tradition of using its formidable military power to bring weaker states into line with what it perceives are international norms. An intervention in

North Korea, which has been considered from time to time, would quite possibly ignite a second Korean war, pulling in Japan and China. If the regional states could demonstrate the ability to resolve their own conflicts, especially in Taiwan and on the Korean peninsula, the United States would have few excuses to intervene. A third cost is the regional arms race. A less worried Japan would be less likely to seek a theater missile defense capability. A China less concerned about U.S. containment would likely devote more of its resources to economic development.

Even those who agree that the cost of missing dialogue is high are hard-pressed to make useful suggestions to remedy the situation. Track two dialogue is a good start, but it is a poor substitute for government-level organizations. Ad hoc track one dialogue on substantive—often crisis issues—is another start. Dialogue beginning on both tracks has the potential, given time, to develop into a more sustained channel of communication. A good example is the intermittent talks the United States has held with North Korea, beginning with discussions on nuclear proliferation. As one crisis has succeeded another, the talks have become more frequent, with the prospect that normalization of relations could eventually result. Throughout the region, the United States remains the most important and omnipresent interlocutor, not only by choice but also by default. Even though the United States is a power foreign to the region, its dialogue role is not a bad thing so long as Americans are willing to gradually relinquish the role as trust among states in the region grows.

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